



UNDERSTANDING GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR COLLEGE-BASED EDUCATION FOR DRUG ABUSE PREVENTION

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ABSTRACT

Drug abuse and experimentation with drugs is not uncommon among students in several countries. Sometimes students may consume drugs on college premises. The reaction of teachers, students and administrators to such an event is an important one because it has an impact on the overall perception of drug abuse among students and it may influence the results of education for drug abuse prevention programmes. Therefore, it is necessary for the college to have a clear and open policy in place on how to deal with these situations. No action should be taken until the validity of the information and evidence relating to the incident has been given careful consideration. Young people may from time to time exhibit some of the signs listed below as they meet normal everyday challenges. A combination of factors should be present before drug use is suspected, but even when all those factors are present, drug use is still only one possibility among all the things that can affect young people.

KEYWORDS: Drug addiction, Drug abuse, College based education.

INTRODUCTION:

Education for drug abuse prevention in colleges may be defined as the educational programmes, policies, procedures and other experiences that contribute to the achievement of broader health goals of preventing drug use and abuse. Education for drug abuse prevention should be seen to include both formal and informal health curricula, the creation of a safe and healthy school environment, the provision of appropriate health services and support as well as the involvement of the family and the community in the planning and delivery of programmes.

Components of a college-based drug abuse – prevention, education and intervention programme:

The educational components of a college drug abuse prevention programme are the following:

• A programme based on the guiding principles for college-based:

Education for drug abuse prevention forms a core component of the college curriculum and focuses on equipping young people with information about drugs, the life skills necessary to enable them to deal with different situations without turning to drugs, the ability to resist pressure to use drugs and an understanding of what drugs are.

• A safe and supportive college environment:

A safe and supportive college environment made possible by a set of clearly communicated policies and procedures that provides care, counseling and support for all students and ensures a cooperative approach among staff, students, parents, and related professionals, agencies and the police.

Strategies for ensuring that all members of the college community contribute to and support college policies and procedures for dealing with drug matters:

- Appropriate professional development and training for relevant staff
- Information and support for parents, in particular parents of students involved in illicit and other unsanctioned drug use
- Mechanisms for continuous monitoring and review of the college's approach to education for drug abuse prevention and incident management

The intervention components of a college drug abuse prevention programme are:

- Policies and procedures for dealing with drug incidents based on the guiding principles for college-based education for drug abuse prevention that consider the student's whole life and the degree to which he or she is in control of his or her actions and decisions.
- Plans for initial and long-term responses to drug incidents aimed at protecting the health of all students and the college community.
- A plan for managing drug incidents consistent with local laws and regulations, as well as national and local college policies on drugs.
- A communication strategy for drug incidents that ensures all staff are aware of college or system-wide procedures for contacting and responding to the media.

- A directory of professionals and agencies, including the police, who can provide opportunities for professional development, advice and resources.
- Agreements with professionals and agencies, including the police, to formalize and strengthen cooperative liaison and referral arrangements.
- Support for students involved in drug incidents that ensures their continued participation in education programmes.

Guiding principles for college-based education for drug abuse prevention:

Principle 1. An emphasis on learning outcomes, environmental factors and collaborative partnerships is vital to the success of college-based education for drug abuse prevention colleges that aim to change drug use behaviour directly risk failing to achieve it since the "target" is not under their control. It ought to be recognized that colleges influence behaviour (they do not determine it) through the development of students' knowledge and skills and the cultivation of values. This in turn requires sufficient time to be allocated to achieving clearly stated learning outcomes and collaborative partnerships with the family and the community to be developed in an atmosphere supportive of personal and academic growth.

Principle 2. Drug-related learning outcomes should be addressed in the context of the health curriculum or other appropriate learning area that can provide sequence, progression, continuity and links to other health issues that impact on students' lives. Isolated programmes cannot provide the ongoing comprehensive and developmental elements that encourage development of personal and social skills and values. Just as drug abuse does not exist in a vacuum but is part of the young person's whole life, education for prevention should incorporate other issues important to young people, including adolescent development, stress and coping, sexuality, collaboration between home and college and personal relationships.

Principle 3. The college environment should be conducive to achieving educational outcomes and building productive partnerships students respond positively to a college environment comprising the culture, milieu, ethos, sense of community, goals and a sense of order in which they feel that they are treated fairly. Students benefit when college is purposeful, when colleges make clear what students should know and do and how those outcomes are to be achieved and measured.

Principle 4. Collaborative partnerships should be developed for decision-making students, college personnel, parents, prevention practitioners, referral agencies and the wider community should collaborate to make decisions on drug policy, including on the management of drug incidents. A collaborative approach to policy development reinforces desired values and consistent behaviours at college, in the home and among the community.

Principle 5. Teaching and learning should be interactive teaching techniques such as discussions, brainstorming, decision-making, assertion training or role-playing new skills and behaviour stimulate the active participation of all students. A supportive classroom climate is promoted by conducting activities in smaller groups, which encourages peer to peer communication and maximum participation.

Principle 6. Educational programmes for the prevention of drug abuse should be responsive and inclusive educational programmes for the prevention of drug abuse should take into account levels of drug use among individuals and in society, risk and protective factors, gender, ethnicity, culture, language, developmental level, ability level, religion and sexual orientation. Interacting with students in a way that acknowledges the reality of their backgrounds and experiences creates opportunities for meaningful student input into education for drug abuse prevention programmes. Students react positively when their individual needs and the needs of users and non-users are acknowledged and communication channels are kept open without drug use being condoned.

Principle 7. Training teachers in drug abuse prevention education enhances the impact and sustainability of drug abuse prevention programmes offering teachers professional development, consisting of an orientation to drug abuse prevention education that enables them to use a range of learning strategies, resources and evaluation techniques appropriate to students' needs, rather than offering training only in the use of a specific programme or resource, ensures that programmes have greater impact and sustainability. Teachers should be offered the support of college leaders, as well as technical advice and networking opportunities for sharing both successes and problems.

Principle 8. Programmes, strategies and resources should be designed to support the teacher, to help achieve drug-related learning outcomes and to contribute to the long-term improvement of the college environment and ethos drug education programmes and resources should be selected to complement the role of classroom teacher with external resources enhancing not replacing that role. The credibility of the teacher's role in meeting student needs may be compromised where externally developed programmes are imposed on schools.

Principle 9. Drug abuse prevention programmes and their outcomes should be evaluated regularly to provide evidence of their worth and to improve the design of future programmes some drug abuse prevention education programmes are not effective and some are counterproductive. Schools can avoid poor practices if they refer to principles, guidelines and models of good practice as standards to inform and guide the evaluation of programmes and outcomes.

Principle 10. Policies and procedures for managing drug-related incidents at schools should be collaboratively developed and widely publicized in order to elicit a positive response and some responses to drug use may marginalize and stigmatize students. Detection of drug use with a solely punitive outcome is not a productive strategy unless the health and safety of the school community is being compromised and could alienate students at risk from the only place where individuals and activities can support their efforts to change.

Teaching Strategies for college-based education for drug abuse prevention:

- **Interactive teaching and the life skills approach:**

A life skills approach is a way of teaching and interacting with young people that has the potential to lead to better health and drug abuse prevention learning outcomes and may ultimately influence student drug use. Life skills are best taught through interactive methods and are most effective when applied and practised in potential drug use situations that are relevant and meaningful to the social situations of students. A life skills approach to education for drug abuse prevention will provide drug information in the context of developing attitudes, values and skills in students. These include skills for increasing self-esteem, setting realistic goals, coping with anxiety, resisting pressures, communicating effectively, making decisions, managing conflict and dealing assertively with social situations in which drugs are offered.

- **Small group work:**

Life skills are best taught in small groups, which provide opportunities for free and thorough exchanges of ideas and increased individual participation. Small group processes, being interactive, are more appropriate to facilitating the examination of attitudes to drugs and drug use and create an environment conducive to attitude change by encouraging trust and reducing personal obstacles to change such as egocentrism (looking at things from your own point of view only) and defensiveness. Evidence suggests that programmes that are teacher-facilitated and student-oriented rather than drug-oriented, one-off or information-based are more likely to achieve drug- and health-related learning outcomes. Effective group work does not happen as a matter of chance, but is a well-orchestrated organizational strategy that requires planning in advance. The facilitator needs to confirm carefully the group goals, organize how the groups are formed, establish group member roles and plan the steps that the groups will follow to achieve their goals. The goals and objectives of group work must be clearly defined before selecting and facilitating a learning activity. The environment in which group work is facilitated is critical to the effectiveness of the process.

- **The facilitator:**

The role of the facilitator is different from that of the instructor. The facilitator should promote an atmosphere of trust, support and encouragement for the group and intervene only when ineffective group behaviour is impacting negatively on group outcomes. An effective facilitator will:

- Model the skills that are being taught

- Use active and interactive methods
- Follow the procedures for experiential learning
- Create an atmosphere of openness, acceptance and support
- Be sensitive to the needs, styles and personal preferences of students
- Introduce, complete and link all learning experiences
- Organize the material, procedures and facilities required
- Be task-oriented and keep to time
- Know, understand and be enthusiastic about the material being presented
- Show enjoyment of the experience and enthusiasm, ensuring that it is a worthwhile personal learning experience
- Focus attention on the key learnings and understandings and the underlying theory and application

- **Experiential learning:**

Experiential learning involves active and interactive participation in structured learning experiences or activities employing a combination of learning styles, including:

- Concrete experience: doing things rather than learning from text
- Observation and reflection: watching the facilitator and other participants and thinking about what is observed and experienced
- Abstraction and generalization of concepts: understanding the theory and purpose behind the activities and linking these to real-life situations
- Testing new ideas and assessing implications: using the safe learning environment to explore ideas and theories, as well as hypotheses

Experiential methods provide students with a balance between didactic and inquiry teaching methods, and the opportunity for everyone to contribute, to share feelings about an activity and its application to interpersonal relationships and to acquire the necessary theory.

Warm-up. Short activities "warm up" the group for the lesson and give members time to focus on group tasks. Activities can be physical or passive, written or oral. As a secondary aim of the warm-up activities is to enhance group empathy, activities should be selected according to the level of group development.

Leading the activity. Before starting an activity, the stage should be set for learning and the purpose of the activity should be clearly stated. An activity or statement can act as a way of connecting the previous session or activity to the present session. The objectives of an activity should be stated from the outset. Group members are more likely to understand the purpose and relevance of the activity and are less inclined to resist it. Once a group is working well, the objectives of an activity need not be stated in advance, but can become clear in the process of work.

Conducting the activity. This provides the experience through which learning objectives are achieved and the information learned is applied to real life. Facilitators should use their knowledge of the group when selecting activities. The activity should be relevant to the desired objective, provide a balance between theory and practice and allow maximum participation.

Reflection. Students should be actively involved in the learning process and should be encouraged to reflect on the learning experiences in terms of how and why activities contributed to the objectives and how activities may be applied to their lives. Reflection is a vital component of the learning process. Learning from an experiential activity occurs when students see how classroom skills and knowledge can be generalized and applied to real-life situations. Making these connections and stating them ensures that the information acquired has maximum impact.

- **Interactive learning experiences:**

Interactive teaching involves learning techniques that complement or are part of the experiential learning approach.

Learner-centred teaching. This method focuses on the needs of the learner and encourages students to participate actively by exploring the issues, questioning and challenging information, instead of being passive recipients. Learning is more effective when there is a high level of participation.

Cooperative learning. Students are encouraged to work towards the achievement of education outcomes collaboratively and to use social cooperation to develop other skills. Cooperative groups develop the social skills of sharing, leadership,

communication, building trust and managing conflict, which are important life skills, for work, within families and for other personal relationships.

The inquiry method. The inquiry method is incorporated into experiential learning to draw issues and lessons from activities. Using this method, teachers would:

- Use a questioning mode that enables students to take responsibility for their learning, in terms of content and style, rather than being provided with information by the teacher
- Encourage student-student interaction as well as student-teacher interaction in a way that respects the ideas and opinions of everyone
- Develop lessons that respond to the needs, interests and concerns of students and are not limited by a set curriculum
- Engage students in exploring how and why they think in a particular way rather than telling them what they should think

Role play. Role play is one of the most useful experiential learning techniques and is ideally suited to group work. Through role play, students can experience and explore the feelings they might have in a social situation and its potential outcomes, without suffering the real consequences of the decisions they make in that situation. Role play can provide an opportunity:

- To broaden a person's skills
- To practice and reinforce new skills without fear of failure or criticism
- To generate solutions to conflict situations in a safe environment
- To consider a range of responses to particular situations
- To experiment with roles and personalities in a non-threatening environment
- To experience the feelings that may accompany decisions

• Decision-making:

Decision-making is a skill that can be learned and practiced. It helps students to look after themselves, their peers, others in the community and their environment. Teachers do not need to be experts to facilitate the learning of decision-making. Decision-making is relevant to education for drug abuse prevention because it promotes and supports student decisions in relation to positive healthy behaviour and acceptable social activity. The role of the facilitator in decision-making is:

- To provide a decision-making process that can be used in a variety of situations
- To help students to realize that they have control over the decisions they make
- To encourage students to gather accurate information from many sources to inform their decisions
- To assist students to assess the positives and negatives of their decisions, including the possible consequences for themselves and for others
- To help students to identify the factors that influence options and choices before an accurate assessment of a situation can be made
- To allow a number of decision-making options to be considered
- To explore feelings and values associated with the various options
- To encourage students to take responsibility for their actions before a choice is made
- To emphasize the need for students to re-evaluate the decisions they make and adapt them to new situations
- To remind students to confirm the decision prior to assertion, as it is critical for students to be committed to the decision before asserting the choice

CONCLUSION:

The college environment and the classroom climate are major variables influencing the effectiveness of education for drug abuse prevention. Students interact in the context of classrooms, each of which has its own normative climate, encouraging or discouraging certain behaviours. Classrooms exist within and form part of the college environment that provides the larger context for all activities in a college. Colleges, as institutions for people in their formative years, are strategic settings for advancing health promoting skills, policies, practices and commu-

nity links. Some of the characteristics of colleges that relate to successful change include quality leadership, teacher morale, teacher mastery, the college environment and resources. The college environment can directly influence emotional well-being and health, as well as academic outcomes. A sense of belonging to both family and college are major protective factors against health-risk behaviours in young people. Students benefit when college is purposeful, when colleges make clear what students should know and do, and describe how they are going to bring about these desired results and how those outcomes are to be achieved and measured.

The role of parents as primary educators can be recognized and supported by colleges by working in partnership with parents. Partnerships with parents and community help to integrate consistent and relevant health messages into the home and the community, improve student health and promote a greater awareness of health issues among students and their families. Programmes that are implemented and initiated in consultation with parents are not only more successful, but also empower parents. Parents often have difficulties discussing drug issues with their children, yet they can be the most trusted and preferred source of information on health issues for young people. Colleges can assist parents by providing them with information on health and drug issues as a group. Colleges working in partnerships with parents remove some of the anxiety parents experience from the expectation that education for drug abuse prevention is their sole responsibility. Further, such programmes have the potential to provide parents with skills and knowledge to broach and discuss the topic of drugs with their children. Parents are also important because families are a primary source of socialization and because parental opinion can either reinforce or countermand the messages of education for drug abuse prevention programmes. Parents are important also as their opinions contribute to community norms about substance use and community support for education for drug abuse prevention.

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